

MARRIAGE REJECTION: FEMINIST STUDY IN KATIE FFORDE'S *GOING DUTCH*

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Abstract

Instead of predominantly functioning to protect women, many toxic marriages even legitimize and institutionalize patriarchal oppression.

This has sparked feminist criticism, as in Katie Fforde's novel *Going Dutch*. Featuring a female character who rejects marriage and lives independently, this study aims to analyze two main aspects: (1) the representation of the rejection of marriage as a form of resistance to patriarchy in the novel and (2) the author's ideological position. Using a feminist approach with Stuart Hall's representation as its conceptual framework, the analysis reveals that the main character, Joana, refuses to remarry because of her traumatic experience in her previous marriage. Her husband forbids her from working or socializing outside the home. After her divorce, Joana chooses to live independently in the Netherlands, pursuing her career and hobbies while achieving economic independence and personal liberty. Through the character of Joana, Katie Fforde criticizes patriarchal norms still embedded in the institution of marriage. *Going Dutch* functions as a work of fiction that Ffordes advocates for women's empowerment and their right to live independently.

INTRODUCTION

The depiction of marriage in literature has long been a rich source of social critique. For centuries, Western literature mainly directed female characters toward marriage, presenting it as the ultimate goal or, on the flip side, a tragic necessity. Foundational feminist literary criticism, such as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's influential work, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), carefully documented how 19th-century literature often portrayed female protagonists caught between the socially accepted "angel in the house" and the defiant "madwoman." Both characters were limited by the rules of a patriarchal society where marriage was the leading institution. These early studies established a critical approach to reading literature that portrays female entrapment and resistance within the confines of homes and marriages.

In recent decades, the discussion has evolved in tandem with social shifts. The rise of "post-feminism" in the late 20th and early 21st centuries introduced a complex and often contradictory cultural scene. Intellectuals like Angela McRobbie (2009) have argued that postfeminist culture often gives the false impression that feminist struggles have been resolved. It highlights individual choices and empowerment while downplaying the ongoing existence of systemic inequalities. This mindset often appears in popular literary genres, such as "chick lit," which, while celebrating female friendships and careers, typically keeps the search for a romantic heterosexual relationship and marriage as the main storyline (Gill & Scharff, 2011). As a result, much of the academic analysis of contemporary women's fiction has focused on this duality, examining how these texts both empower female readers and reinforce traditional romantic ideals.

This body of work reveals a significant gap in research. While there is extensive scholarship on the historical portrayal of marital confinement (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979) and the contradictory reinforcement of romance in postfeminist popular fiction (McRobbie, 2009), there is comparatively little critical attention on contemporary novels that intentionally go against these themes by focusing on a heroine's successful and satisfying rejection of marriage. Most studies focus on the journey within or toward a relationship, rather than the deliberate choice to live independently as a form of resistance to patriarchal beliefs. Even though the independent woman is a familiar figure, her story is not often explicitly examined through the lens of rejecting marriage as a direct response to its institutional issues.

Thus, the proposed study on Katie Fforde's *Going Dutch* (2007) is necessary and timely. It directly addresses the identified gap by focusing on a story that does not end in marriage. Instead, it supports a woman's choice to create a life on her terms after confronting the

oppressive nature of the institution. By examining how the protagonist, Joana, achieves economic independence and personal freedom, the study extends beyond simply celebrating "choice" to explore the deeper political implications of her actions.

Using Stuart Hall's representation, the feminist study explores how marriage rejection is constructed in the novel. Hall (1997) explains that literary texts are active participants in the social production of meaning rather than passive ones. By analyzing how a text constructs its representations, we can effectively reveal the ideologies implied in a literary work, uncovering the writer's ideological agenda and stance. Therefore, the main goal of this research is to study the meaning constructed through the representation of marriage rejection by the principal female character in the novel. This study aims to reveal the author's ideological stance on these issues and identify any underlying agendas that may influence her writing.

This research is important because it demonstrates how popular fiction can serve as a powerful platform for contemporary feminist critique, challenging the subtle yet pervasive patriarchal norms that postfeminist culture often obscures. It will provide a vital case study on how literature can support feminism as a real and impactful form of resistance to ongoing institutional oppression related to marriage.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The rejection of the marriage institution, as depicted in contemporary fiction such as Katie Fforde's *Going Dutch*, can be viewed as a significant act of women's resistance. To understand this narrative, we require a solid framework grounded in fundamental feminist critiques of marriage, theories of female independence, and insights into the politics of cultural representation.

A key aspect of the feminist critique of marriage is its role in maintaining patriarchal control. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argued that throughout history, marriage has primarily defined women as "the Other," shaping their identities concerning men. She claimed that traditional roles of wife and homemaker often lead to economic dependence and social isolation, which limit a woman's potential for growth and self-discovery. Kate Millett (1970) expanded on this idea in *Sexual Politics* by identifying the family as the leading institution of patriarchy. She argued that the marriage contract has historically reinforced male dominance and female submissiveness, creating a power imbalance that affects all aspects of society. This imbalance continues in modern times. Arlie Hochschild's concept of the "second shift" shows that women who work outside the home

often carry a heavier burden of domestic tasks and childcare. This condition highlights the lasting patriarchal agreements embedded in marriage norms (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). This theory supports the abstract's claim that marriage can "institutionalize patriarchal oppression," which Joana experiences when her husband forbids her from working or socializing.

In response to this oppressive potential, the pursuit of female independence has become a central idea in feminist thought and action. Rejecting or leaving a traditional marriage to live independently directly challenges patriarchal expectations. Virginia Woolf's (1929) essay, *A Room of One's Own*, powerfully articulates this resistance. Woolf argues that a woman needs "money and a room of her own" to be genuinely free, making a strong case for economic independence as essential for intellectual and personal liberty. By having a career and financial self-sufficiency, a woman breaks the dependence that de Beauvoir described, allowing her to define her own life. This shift from oppression to independence is a crucial aspect of empowerment. Feminist thinker Bell Hooks (2000) builds on this by critiquing patriarchal ideas of love and partnership and advocating for love based on mutual recognition, freedom, and spiritual growth—elements often stifled by traditional marriage. Joana's decision to pursue her career and interests in the Netherlands aligns with this feminist ideal of self-actualization beyond restrictive marriage roles.

Finally, understanding how these ideas are expressed and challenged in culture requires a representation theory, such as that of Stuart Hall. Hall (1997) suggested that representation goes beyond simply reflecting reality; it shapes meanings and influences our understanding of the world. A work of fiction like *Going Dutch* is not just a narrative but a cultural statement. It engages in what Hall calls "the politics of representation" by questioning dominant, patriarchal views about women, love, and marriage. By presenting a female character who finds happiness and fulfillment after leaving a limiting marriage, the novel offers an alternative narrative for women's lives. It challenges the common assumption that a woman's ultimate goal is marriage, instead showing independence as a valid and empowering choice. Through Joana's character, the author engages in cultural politics, utilizing the story to critique patriarchal norms and advocate for women's empowerment. This case shows how popular fiction can effectively critique society and promote feminist ideals.

In conclusion, analyzing a character's rejection of marriage is significantly enhanced by the application of established feminist theory. The critiques of marriage as a patriarchal system by thinkers like de Beauvoir and Millett provide the political foundation. The feminist focus on economic and personal independence, highlighted by Woolf and hooks, explains the

character's motivations and goals. Stuart Hall's theory of representation clarifies how a fictional story acts as a powerful cultural force. These ideas help us understand how a novel like *Going Dutch* can reflect and influence the ongoing struggle for female independence and the redefinition of women's roles in modern society.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology, drawing primary data from the novel *Going Dutch* (2007). In line with Moleong's (2019) perspective, the data for this study are not quantifiable numerical figures but rather textual units, specifically in the form of sentences, narratives, quotations, dialogues, and conversations extracted directly from the novel. This qualitative approach is particularly suitable for examining how marriage rejection is constructed within the literary text and for understanding the novelist's underlying ideological stance.

This research collects two types of data: primary and secondary data. The primary data comes from Fforde's *Going Dutch*. Close reading from a feminist perspective is conducted to comprehend the entire story and uncover the main female character's rejection of marriage in the novel. Furthermore, secondary data are gathered from various sources, including scholarly articles and essays that explore the socio-cultural background of the novel. Feminist skepticism toward marriage in contemporary England, as well as the writer's life background, is also elaborated upon to strengthen the contextual data.

The analysis starts with a textual analysis of the novel from a feminist perspective. The analytical focus will be on meticulously examining the status, roles, and agency of the main female character within the novel, scrutinizing how her experiences with marriage rejection are portrayed. Then, the textual analysis is placed within the socio-cultural context of the novel. Relating textual and contextual analysis can reveal the writer's ideological position.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Marriage Rejection Represented in Katie Fforde's *Going Dutch*

This sub-chapter explains the rejection of marriage described in *Going Dutch*. This sub-chapter addresses two issues that contribute to resistance to women's domestication and self-empowerment. The issue of resistance to women's domestication will also explain how freedom for social relations, employment opportunities, and economic independence are constructed. From a feminist perspective, these issues are explained through Hall's representation approach.

Resistance to Women's Domestication

In the context of feminism, resistance is considered a crucial concept for challenging male dominance in a patriarchal environment, including within the domestic sphere. Despite the strength of patriarchy, there is always some space for resistance to emerge and thrive (Aggarwal, 2004). As subordinate classes, women often employ strategies of resistance against the dominant patriarchal class to ensure their survival and assert their identities. The domestication of women is often viewed as "natural," confining women's roles to the domestic sphere, such as managing a household. This perspective is rooted in the belief that women have specific, universal tasks tied to biological needs, such as reproduction and sexuality. Consequently, women's social roles are often restricted and not recognized beyond the household (Rogers, 1980).

According to research by Asri (2018), there are several reasons why studying women who choose to reject marriages that perpetuate their oppression is important. First, feminist studies indicate that the social roles of women and men are regulated by what is known as patriarchal culture. Walby (1989) describes patriarchy as a social system, institution, or practice in which men maintain dominant positions while oppressing and exploiting women. Second, the prevalence of patriarchal culture warrants examination, particularly regarding feminism and the pursuit of gender equality for women. Third, in a society governed by a patriarchal culture, power is predominantly held by men, leaving women with little influence and minimal rights in public life. They often rely on men in economic, social, political, and psychological areas, particularly in the context of marriage. As a result, women seek greater autonomy over their lives.

When exploring the discourse of resistance against women's domestication and the quest for self-empowerment, a discursive approach is employed, utilizing both the text and context of the novel *Going Dutch* to address narratives surrounding the rejection of marriage. It is essential to grasp the social and cultural context that shapes the language used and disseminated. As Hall points out, Foucault emphasized that discourse constructs meaning and provides the language necessary to convey knowledge about specific issues during particular historical moments (Hall, 1997, p. 46). Each era produces its discourse. This research elucidates how the themes of rejecting marriage in the novel relate to the context of 21st-century England, particularly highlighting the depiction of women's resistance to domestic responsibilities and their pursuit of self-empowerment.

The novel's early chapters explain that Joana, the main female character, does not have the opportunity to mingle with her social environment. She has a husband who forbids her from leaving the house. Joana is only allowed to stay at home doing homework. Meanwhile, her husband can go to work. It includes the issue of gender discrimination that women still experience in many countries, including England. The right to equality has been achieved since the feminist movement emerged in the context of industrial society and liberal politics, related to the liberal women's rights movement and early socialist feminism, which began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America and Europe (Krolokke, 2005). However, the gender gap is still a growing problem in England. The establishment of the Women and Equality Ministry unit in England in 2007, which prioritizes women's issues and addresses gender inequality, is evidence.

When I think of all the proper meals I made for my husband, when I'd've been thrilled eating scrambled eggs and salad most of the time, it makes me realize what an utter waste of time marriage can be. You were very sensible not going through with your wedding.' (Fforde, 2007, p. 7)

This narrative depicts Joana's regret of serving her husband by giving him his favorite foods. Joana realized her marriage was a waste of time and decided not to marry again after she could no longer accept her husband's demands and caught him cheating. This condition is referred to as the domestic-public dichotomy, as explained by Rosaldo (1974). The concept of domestic and public dichotomy is one way to understand how gender differences are represented in social activities in various cultures. Activities associated with women are often viewed as less valuable than those of men, which are frequently culturally legitimized as a form of authority. In 21st-century Britain, although women have made much progress in formal domains—such as education, politics, and professional work—their social relationships still reflect structural inequalities that have not yet been fully overcome. This phenomenon reveals a contradiction between normative progress and social reality, which remains unequal. Contemporary British women enjoy far greater freedom and opportunities than previous generations in terms of education, employment, and lifestyle choices. However, they still face systemic barriers, including the gender pay gap, the double burden of paid and unpaid work, and concerns about physical safety (Bates, 2014).

In 21st-century England, women have taken a stand against patriarchy and have become increasingly empowered. de Bellaigue et al. (2022) suggests that expanding educational opportunities for women in this era has had a more intricate impact than simply comparing qualifications over time. She emphasizes the significance of enhancing the welfare state, the influence of medieval reforms on educational prospects, and the necessity for qualified

women to facilitate this expansion. Contemporary British women navigate the balance between dependence and independence in marriage. Instead of following a straightforward path towards liberation from dependence, many women experience a delayed coming of age, marked by alternating periods of dependence and independence throughout their married lives (Goode, 1993).

In the novel, Joana is portrayed as having friends and starting a new life on a boat after separating from her husband. In England, many people choose to live on ships, with an estimated 50,000 individuals residing on boats in 2021. This number will likely increase due to the ongoing housing crisis (APPG, 2021). Some live a nomadic lifestyle, sailing constantly, while others prefer staying at the edges of the canals. Joana finds joy and connects with her friends while living on the ship. As Aucmuthy (2012) states, marriage, once deemed essential and the only acceptable status for women in the 1950s, has diminished in influence and has become merely a lifestyle choice for many British women today.

Moreover, many individuals are choosing to refuse marriage (Aucmuthy, 2012). Joana ultimately feels happy, illustrating that her decision to reject marriage was best for her. The contrast between being a wife and being divorced is significant. Gade and Anantha Laksmi (2016) cite a husband who claims to prioritize his wife's interests in decision-making and remain vigilant to avoid deviating from a faithful relationship. This statement reflects the idealism of a husband committed to maintaining the integrity of the household. However, Gade questions why so many wives still express unhappiness and dissatisfaction with their married lives despite such promises (Gade & Anantha Laksmi, 2016). This invites reflection on how these commitments are realized in daily life.

According to the Office for National Statistics (Sharfman & Cobb, 2024), there were 80,057 divorces granted in England and Wales in 2022, representing a 29.5% decrease from 2021, when 113,505 divorces were granted. This marks the lowest number since 1971. In 2022, the median duration of marriages that ended in divorce was 12.9 years for opposite-sex couples, 7.5 years for male same-sex couples, and 6.3 years for female same-sex couples, which is the longest duration recorded in our time series. The divorce rate in 2022 was 6.7 for men and 6.6 for women per 1,000 married individuals (including both opposite-sex and same-sex couples), lower than the rates in 2021, which were 9.5 for men and 9.4 for women. There were also 525 dissolutions of civil partnerships (including same-sex and opposite-sex couples) in 2022, a 22.8% decrease compared to 2021, marking the lowest number since 2010.

The number of divorces and separations in 2022 may have been influenced by the new Divorce and Separation Act, which took effect on April 6, 2022. This law introduces new mandatory waiting periods at key stages and allows couples to end their relationship together, removing the previous grounds for divorce. Of the divorces in 2022, 7,394 were processed under the Divorce, Dissolution, and Separation Act, which accounted for 9.2% of all divorces and 10.3% of all dissolutions. Additionally, 28.8% of divorces under the new law and 61.1% of new law dissolutions were granted on a joint petition. This data indicates that the divorce rate is trending higher each year.

After having the freedom to mingle with her surroundings and being able to have friends, Jo also tried to get a job. She wants to be a woman who earns money and has a career. Job opportunity and economic independence are closely related concepts. A job opportunity refers to finding employment and engaging in economic activities that generate income. Economic independence, on the other hand, refers to an individual's ability to be financially self-sufficient and not reliant on others to meet their basic needs (Brooks et al., 2024). Over the past 40 years, the UK has seen a steady increase in the percentage of women in the workforce. The employment rate for women of productive age (25-54 years) rose from 57% in 1975 to a record high of 78% in 2017 (IFS, 2018). It happens to Joana, as seen in the narrative:

I had been on a course,' said Jo. 'I used to go on a lot of merequo courses.' She sighed, allowing nostalgia to make her sad for a moment. 'Are you interested in that old mirror?' Miranda seemed to sense the dip in Jo's mood. 'Oh yes.' Jo brightened up. 'I love the old glass - it is really flattering.'" Then why don't you see what you can do? If it turns out well, I can put it in the shop, and you can have the money. If you do not want to keep it,' said Miranda. (Fforde, 2007, p. 43)

Joana tries to work by utilizing her abilities and hobbies. She received an offer from a relative who had a job matching Joana's. Joana was thrilled to have this job and wanted a steady income. Previously, Joana was unable to have a job or earn an income because her ex-husband had forbidden her. As Asri (2018) said, patriarchy is a limitation of employment opportunities. Men are placed in the public sector.

Meanwhile, women are in the domestic sector. It has been proven that society's perspective often reduces women. Thus, it can be said that, over time, women's roles have not achieved gender equality with those of men. Many things can happen, as observed from this asymmetric relationship. In a family, for example, women are responsible for caring for children and serving their husbands. In the public sector, women have fewer job opportunities than men (Asri, 2018). Transformations in employment and organization, the entry of women

into the workforce in the last decades of the 20th century, and recent changes in how careers and career development are conceptualized. The issues faced by women in the workforce must still be addressed. Although the number of women in organizations has increased exponentially over the past decade, men continue to dominate organizational leadership.

Despite having free time to play, Jo takes advantage of it by searching for an agency or job opportunity. It indicates that she does not view her career as a game; she takes it seriously in her pursuit of equality with men. This sentiment reflects the increasing number of working women in England compared to the total female population in the 21st century. For more than 70 years before the last census, approximately 25 percent of all women were employed (James, 2009). In the novel, Joana expresses confidence and recognizes her strong skills. A regular job empowers Jo and makes her feel less vulnerable, even though she is over fifty; being a working woman with a place to live matters to her.

Regarding the working age in England, James (2009) noted that the twentieth century saw a compensatory increase in women's employment, particularly in office jobs. However, these jobs are predominantly held by women, particularly in the fields of insurance, banking, and finance. With the rise of mechanization in office work, there remains a demand for girls' speed and manual dexterity. Consequently, the increasing participation of young women in the workforce in Britain before the Second World War likely reflected shifts in the employment structure. James also highlighted that every census from 1901 to 1951 showed a rise in the employment of women aged 15 to 20, with the percentage increasing from 65 to 80. It was not until this age group was fully utilized that significant changes occurred in the workforce composition at older ages (James, 2009).

Jo shares her thoughts with Dora, her daughter's friend, who lives with her. Dora feels comfortable with Jo since she has also left her fiancé, as she values her freedom. She fears that marrying him would limit her ability to pursue her career. In the novel context, this moment represents introspection for the character, who questions power dynamics and commitment in the relationship (Gottman, 2011). Research by Gottman on marital stability (2011) identified trust as a fundamental element allowing couples to operate independently without jeopardizing their emotional bond. The female character's doubts about Marcus reflect her concerns over whether this foundational trust exists in their relationship. It also reflects sociologist Giddens' idea of transforming intimacy in modern society, where relationships are increasingly defined by ongoing negotiation of expectations rather than traditionally established roles (Giddens, 1992). The character's questioning of Marcus's behavior illustrates this negotiation process, where boundaries of acceptable behavior at

various relationship stages are not fixed but must be continuously assessed and agreed upon. Doubts about marital commitment can further be understood through the commitment dilemma identified by evolutionary psychologist Buss (2016). This dilemma arises from the tension between the desire for the long-term security and stability of marriage and the uncertainty regarding a partner's faithfulness and support (Buss, 2016).

Self Empowerment

In essence, self-empowerment involves a process in which women gain control over their lives, learn to find a closer connection between goals and efforts, and find ways to set goals and achieve desired outcomes (Koelen & Lindström, 2005). In Katie Fforde's novel *Going Dutch*, the main character, Joana, provides a striking example of a woman who chooses to reject traditional marriage, thereby serving as a significant act of self-empowerment. Her journey, marked by her refusal to remarry and her pursuit of independence, aligns closely with key feminist ideas.

Joana's path to self-empowerment is directly linked to her painful experiences in an unhealthy marriage. Her husband's controlling behavior, seen in his restrictions on her work and social life, left her dependent, reflecting de Beauvoir's idea of woman as the "Other." In *The Second Sex* (1949), de Beauvoir argues that women are often defined not by their own identity but by men, pushed into a passive role while men engage in action and creation. Joana's first marriage illustrates this point well: her identity and actions were controlled by her husband, turning her into an object rather than an independent individual. Kate Millet expanded on this in *Sexual Politics* (1970), showing that these domestic issues are political, asserting that "patriarchy is not merely a social custom but a political institution" that systematically oppresses women. Joana's experience showcases Millet's idea that patriarchal authority impacts personal life, turning marriage into a source of oppression. Thus, her choice to divorce was not just a relationship ending; it was a bold act of defiance against a system that had robbed her of her basic freedoms and identity.

Free from these patriarchal ties, Joana's actions in *Going Dutch* illustrate her self-empowerment through her decision to reject marriage. She lives independently, rather than seeking another partner for security or status. Joana has convinced herself that she cannot rely on men and does not need to. As noted in the narrative, while Marcus began working on some repairs for his boat, Joana chose to refuse his assistance. In contemporary British society, a growing distrust of men as romantic partners and emotional supporters has emerged in social and cultural discourse. British women are increasingly valuing independence in romantic relationships. This trend, known as the individualization of femininity, signifies a

shift from traditional expectations that women find fulfillment primarily through marriage and motherhood (Budgeon & Roseneil, 2004). The character of Joana in Fforde's novels exemplifies this trend; her experience of a failed marriage has led her to embrace a philosophy of independence, rejecting dependence on men. This emphasis on autonomy and the denial of vulnerability in relationships with men illustrates the development of a new female subjectivity in Britain (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Since the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, awareness of structural inequalities in heterosexual relationships and marriage in Britain has grown. The British "Liberation of Liberation" movement promoted women's economic and emotional independence as a pathway to equality (Gill & Scharff, 2021). Joana's independence can be viewed as a reflection of her self-empowerment, where dependence on men is seen as unnecessary and a potential risk to women's autonomy. The rising divorce rate in England further contextualizes Joana's attitudes. The Office for National Statistics (Sharfman & Cobb, 2024) in England reports a significant increase in divorce rates since the liberalization of divorce laws in 1969. As marital separation becomes more common, narratives of starting over and finding independence post-divorce have entered mainstream culture.

In summary, Joana's decision to reject marriage in *Going Dutch* powerfully illustrates self-empowerment. Through her complicated past and journey toward independence, Fforde shows how a female character can reclaim her agency by challenging the expectations of traditional marriage. Joana's narrative represents a story of conscious choices, financial self-sufficiency, and personal satisfaction achieved beyond conventional marriage.

Ideological Position of The Author

The British feminist movement in the 21st century has undergone a significant transformation, bringing forth new perspectives towards marriage. There has been considerable criticism of marriage within 21st-century British feminism, rooted in the belief that traditional marriage is a patriarchal institution that has historically restricted women's autonomy. According to the 2022 British Social Attitudes Survey, nearly 45% of women aged 18-34 in England now have skepticism about marriage, an increase from just 29% in 2010 (Etherington, 2022).

As a cultural product, *Going Dutch* reflects women's skepticism about marriage in contemporary times. The story explores economic independence, women's empowerment, and liberation from a constrictive marriage. The main character, Joana, embodies these themes as she navigates her new reality. In *Going Dutch*, Katie Fforde examines what literary scholar Smyth (2024) describes as "solidarity feminism," which emphasizes that women can

find strength and support through relationships with one another. The protagonists in the novel build a supportive community that helps them overcome personal and professional challenges without relying on male figures for guidance.

Her diverse life experiences—living on a boat, working in a bookshop, and being a housewife in rural Gloucestershire—provide an authentic foundation for her stories, which often feature independent female characters overcoming personal and professional obstacles. Fforde began her writing career in her 30s after marrying and having three children. She published her first novel, *Living Dangerously*, in 1995 and has written over 25 novels, most of which center on female protagonists grappling with significant life changes. While Fforde does not explicitly identify as a feminist, her work reflects principles of practical feminism that emphasize women's autonomy and choice. In an interview with *The Guardian* (2018), she stated, "I am interested in writing about women trying to find their way. I want them not to depend financially on other people because that is absolute freedom."

By embedding this feminist message in a mainstream genre, Fforde broadens her critique of traditional norms, directly addressing the concerns of her readers. Her work argues that a woman's right to live independently, pursue a career, and enjoy personal freedoms is essential, regardless of marital status. Thus, *Going Dutch* serves not just as entertainment but as a strong statement advocating for women's right to self-sovereignty and a redefinition of success on their terms. It contributes to the ongoing cultural conversation about changing gender roles and relationships in contemporary Britain.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the representation of marriage rejection and women's pursuit of autonomy in *Going Dutch* by Fforde. It focuses on how the main female character, Joana, seeks freedom of expression through her hobbies and dream job, and how the novel portrays a woman's journey toward economic independence outside the institution of marriage. The novel illustrates Joana's rejection of marriage as a liberating step following a traumatic marital experience. After her divorce, Joana can pursue her interests and gain financial independence—something that her ex-husband previously restricted. This newfound autonomy allows her to reclaim her identity and live on her terms. The narrative aligns with the broader social reality of 21st-century English women, many of whom are empowered and economically independent regardless of marital status. The ideological message conveyed in the novel supports the notion that marriage can limit women's freedom and personal growth

and that choosing not to marry can be a valid path toward empowerment. Fforde advocates for a model of female independence that does not rely on traditional marital structures.

This research is limited to a single novel by a British author, which narrows the cultural and literary scope of the analysis. As such, the findings may not fully represent broader or global feminist literary expressions on the issue of marriage rejection and economic autonomy. Ultimately, future studies could expand on this research by comparing the portrayal of marriage rejection in *Going Dutch* with that in contemporary novels by other female authors, particularly those from different cultural and social backgrounds. It would enable a deeper understanding of how women's economic independence is interpreted across diverse contexts and how cultural frameworks shape feminist narratives in literature.

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